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ABSTRACT

A study investigated the relationship between student teachers' constructs of how knowledge is generated and organized (their levels of reflective judgment) and actual teaching practices (instructional patterns). Both elementary and secondary level student teachers at one particular field experience center participated. Instructional patterns of the student teachers in the classroom were recorded in field notes and analyzed. Additional data were drawn from the reading methods course records, anecdotal notes of clinical teachers' comments and student teacher conferences, final grade point averages, scores on the Reflective Judgment Interview, and students' journals. Results indicated a relationship between students' reflective judgment scores and their classroom practices. However, there did not appear to be a relationship between reflective judgment scores and either grades from the reading methods coursework, student teaching or total grade point averages, or the content of journal entries. Implications are drawn for student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors and methodology instructors. (Author/RS)

# The Relationship Between Student Teachers' Reading Instructional Behaviors and Reflective Judgment

by

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## Abstract

A current emphasis in the preparation and education of prospective teachers is the development of critical reflection, i.e., reflective judgment. Under present pedagogical procedures in universities, students do not seem to attain high levels of reflective judgment. This study investigates the relationship between student teachers' constructs of how knowledge is generated and organized (their levels of reflective judgment) and actual teaching practices (instructional patterns). Both elementary and secondary level student teachers at one particular field experience center participated in this study. Instructional patterns of the student teachers in the classroom were recorded in field notes and analyzed. Additional data were drawn from the reading methods course records, anecdotal notes of clinical teachers' comments and student teacher conferences, final grade point averages, scores on the Reflective Judgment Interview, and students' journals. Data indicated a relationship between students' reflective judgment scores and their classroom practices. However, there did not appear to be a relationship between reflective judgment scores and either grades from the reading methods coursework, student teaching or total grade point averages, or the content of journal entries. Implications are drawn for student teachers, cooperating teachers, and university supervisors and methodology instructors.

# The Relationship Between Student Teachers' Reading Instructional Behaviors and Reflective Judgment

A current emphasis in the preparation and education of prospective teachers is the development of critical reflection, that is, reflective judgment. Since 1933, when Dewey identified reflective thinking as a goal of education, researchers and teacher educators have worked to define terms, describe what and how a reflective thinker acts, and to transform that knowledge into instructional methods which would promote development of reflective thinking among individual students. Dewey described a reflective thinker as one who makes "grounded" or "warranted" judgments based on such criteria as evaluation of evidence, consideration of expert opinion, adequacy of argument, and implications of the proposed solution.

Under present pedagogical procedures in universities, students do not seem to attain high levels of reflective judgment. Specifically, Pape and Kelly (1991) found no differences in reflective judgment scores between students just beginning the teacher education program and those graduating from it. These findings are consistent with patterns across other academic majors (Kitchener & King, 1990a). Individuals appear to be quite consistent in their reasoning across different cognitive tasks when confronted with ill structured problems, i.e., problems for which some factors are either unknown or unknowable. The data also suggest that there may be age-related, developmental ceilings on the highest stage of reasoning (reflective judgment) an individual can use. In other words, young students prior to age twenty-four may not be able to understand or emulate what Dewey described as reflective thinking despite carefully designed, developmentally appropriate learning environments (Kitchener & King, 1990b). Further, additional research indicates that students who are already reflective tend to become more reflective during coursework that emphasizes reflectivity, while those who show no inclination toward reflective thinking do not change. However, reflective thought patterns are used less during periods of stress by the former group and not at all by the latter group (McKinnon, 1987).

In the public school classroom student teachers often have difficulty moving out of their established frameworks of basic assumptions about teaching and learning, particularly about the teaching of reading, developed during years of apprenticeship as pupils (Lortie, 1975). In secondary settings, the teaching of reading has been often ignored, while in elementary classrooms it has been driven by the basal reader and its accompanying teacher's guide. The research on

student teaching indicates that student teachers are influenced by many external pressures, such as the need to succeed, lack of experience, and the models established by their cooperating teachers (Denton,1983).

The processes of decision making, including decision making about how to teach reading, are intimately connected to the students' "repertoires of exemplars" (their cooperating teachers) and their basic assumptions about teaching reading; however, the exemplars may be less than sterling while the opportunities to practice alternative strategies severely limited. Traditionally, there has been a lack of critical reflection among those utilizing a basal system to teach reading. Many teachers accept the directives from the guide and apply those directives uncritically (Durkin, 1978-79). This uncritical acceptance of the basal system is modeled for the student teachers under their supervision.

This study investigates the relationship between student teachers' constructs of how knowledge is generated and organized (their levels of reflective judgment) and actual teaching practices (instructional patterns).

## Methodology

Both elementary and secondary level student teachers at one particular field experience center participated in this study. Instructional patterns of the student teachers in the classroom were recorded in field notes and analyzed. Additional data were drawn from the reading methods course records, anecdotal notes of clinical teachers' comments and student teacher conferences, final grade point averages, scores on the Reflective Judgment Interview, and students' journals.

A requirement of the student teaching practicum was that students keep a weekly journal of their experiences. Students were directed to focus a portion of their writing each week on an observed reading event. They were to describe the event itself, to elaborate upon the classroom context, to analyze the essence and ramifications of the event, and to reflect upon the event from their own personal and theoretical perspectives. The journals were collected weekly, read and commented on by the two researchers involved in the study, and returned to the students. Copies of the journals were made and kept for analysis.

The reading methods coursework which the elementary and special education student teachers had taken provided opportunities for the students to anticipate classroom experience by projecting possible

instructional situations and developing rationales for their choices. Secondary student teachers had not participated in any reading methodology coursework in their teacher education program.

In the reflective judgment interviews (Perry, 1970, 1981; Strange & King, 1981), students were presented with three bipolar educational issues. The interviews were audiotaped and scored by trained raters, with an interrater reliability of .92 for the team. Three primary positions have been identified. The initial position of **dualism** (levels 1-3) maintains an absolutist perspective of knowledge based on authority. A **multiplistic** view (level 4) represents a belief that "everybody has a right to his or her own opinion," while a **relativistic** view (levels 5-7) recognizes that opinion must be supported with data and that some things are more valued than others.

## Data analysis

Narrative field notes of observations of the student teachers, made by one of the researchers on at least a biweekly schedule throughout each semester, were analyzed to develop representations (vignettes) of instructional patterns. Two distinct patterns, labeled teacher centered and student centered, were found among these vignettes. The content of the reading event journals was analyzed for patterns of thinking representing technical aspects of instruction, analytical practices, and critical reflection. The technical aspects of instruction are the efficient application of known methods to achieve unquestioned ends in teaching. Ongoing assessment of teaching actions is the hallmark of analytical practice. Critical reflection is best described as the examination of underlying assumptions and/or social and moral implications of both teaching practices and learning.

Level three and level five designations on the Reflective Judgment Interviews at times were difficult to discriminate. Level three confirms an absolutist perspective of knowledge based on authority. Level five recognizes that opinion must be supported with data, and that some things are more valued than others. Some data may appear to be level five, while in reality the individual is depending on an authority (often a university professor) without citing that authority. For example, zealous support for a particular methodology or theory may sound like level five, when the zealot is actually parroting ideas over-learned in course work.

In this paper, the levels designated as relativistic thinking follow Perry's (1981) original conception. Kitchener and King (1990a) refer to the reflective judgment level four as relativistic thinking;

however, Perry categorized level four thinking as multiplistic, and levels five and above as relativistic.

## Results

Data indicated a relationship between students' reflective judgment scores and their classroom practices. However, there does not appear to be a relationship between grades from the reading methods coursework and reflective judgment scores nor between student teaching or total grade point average and reflective judgment scores. Also, between the content of journal entries and reflective judgment scores no relationship was found.

Students who scored in the dualistic range (levels 1-3) exhibited instructional patterns characterized by dependence on authorities, such as a teacher's guide or the cooperating teacher's directives and faithful execution of the script and related materials in the guide. Tests administered by these students tended to come directly from the teaching materials available with the text and often required pupils only to repeat facts or recall explicit information. Cooperating teachers of these students complained of the students' low levels of initiative and remarked about this on the final evaluations. Most often these students lectured or told pupils what to learn, displaying little flexibility with regard to teaching method. These students were more likely to place responsibility for pupils' learning difficulties on factors other than themselves, e.g., text difficulties, pupil laziness, boring stories, and lack of parental cooperation. They exhibited a teaching style classified as teacher centered.

On the other hand, students who scored in the relativistic range (levels 5-7) exhibited instructional patterns characterized by high levels of initiative which materialized, for example, as a creative use of texts and related materials and as suggestions for different ways to present the traditional content. They seized opportunities to demonstrate their abilities by bringing in alternative resources, rearranging the learning environment, and creating teaching materials. Tests were often designed by the student teacher and included opportunities for pupils to express opinions, apply learning, and explain reasoning. These students varied their teaching methods, for example, using lecture, discovery, and cooperative learning to help pupils gain meaning from content instruction. These student teachers exhibited a teaching style classified as student centered.

A third pattern was noted, in which five students' reflective judgment scores were scattered across levels three to six. These students tended to be unsure of their abilities, knowledge, and roles.

They were skeptical of authority, including not only their cooperating teachers but also district mandates and university coursework, the latter because of perceived discrepancies between their training and the real world of the classroom. They were hesitant to make changes or suggest different procedures without a direct invitation to do so. The teaching styles of these students were classified as teacher centered.

Students, cooperating teachers, university instructors and supervisors often hold the "commonsense view" that experience is the best teacher. This "learning by doing" may represent reproduction of uncritically accepted and, for the student teachers, untested practices such as the use of the basal reading system. Students must come to terms with discrepancies between what they have learned in coursework and what appears to work in the context of real classrooms.

## Implications

The implications of this research touch both methodology coursework instructors and field supervisors. Students at differing levels of reflective judgment may require differing learning environments. Those who hold a dualistic perspective may need a structured environment in which they are encouraged to confront puzzling issues, explore conflicting beliefs and points of view about, for example, teaching and learning to read. Those who hold multiplistic points of view must defend and justify their own positions while both attending and responding to alternative justifications provided by others. Since the nature of the struggle to achieve relativism is embedded in a social context, instructors might initiate experiences which are open to question and confront the individual belief systems about teaching and learning. They could offer opportunities for all students to increase their perceptions of the ambiguity of all knowledge by offering experiences where students might see and participate in alternative models.

Critically important in enabling student teachers to maintain an active, rational exploration of the tasks of teaching is the need to help them to come to terms with the different perspectives which they will inevitably encounter in schools and at the university. There is a need to enable them to see that these different messages are not necessarily opposed, but that educationally valuable and effective practices which are acceptable and/or feasible in one context may not be either effective or feasible in another.

Cooperating teachers, supervisors, and instructors need to collaborate to facilitate students' testing of their ideas. However, before students are able to adequately analyze and test their ideas, they need fluency in using effective approaches to teaching. First, a basic competence in finding effective ways of operating in a classroom is necessary. Then students may begin to articulate the kinds of teachers they wish to be, investigate ways to realize this, and acquire metacognitive abilities which will allow them to evaluate their own teaching. Motivation to think deeply thrives in a supportive community of peers, guided by a teacher who is willing to let students figure things out for themselves (Finkel & Monk, 1983).

The pedagogical strategies about teaching reading which we want our students to learn and practice may place conceptual demands on both the students and their cooperating teachers. Changes in practice may require teachers to restructure their beliefs about teaching, learning, and the nature of reading. It is often time consuming and problematic to change one's view of reading instruction, and it may be personally threatening especially for the classroom teacher. Certain metacognitive skills, (those associated with levels five through seven) such as comparison, evaluation, and self-correction, are necessary for the detachment required to critically reflect on one's own practice.

We believe the development of a relativistic perspective allows students greater opportunity. They should be able to make more thoughtful and appropriate teaching decisions, to be more flexible and sensitive in choosing teaching methods, and to consider thoughtfully those moral and ethical issues related to the educational opportunities they offer their pupils.

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